

# the Child

## Who Goes Wrong in Wartime

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Illustrated by Richard Priest

**P**REOCCUPIED by events abroad, concerned as we all are in defense at home and the building and equipping of an army of more than ten million young men, are we prone to forget some of the grave problems arising on our home front? One of them is increasing juvenile delinquency.

Delinquency is no new problem caused by the war but it may be increased by it. Every year about 200,000 delinquent children, each of them a problem, have been coming before our juvenile courts. This is not a concern of our cities only, though it is intensified there. Every town and rural community has its neglected children and its maladjusted youth, who instead of developing into fine upright citizens, assets to the country, go on to fill our prisons—expensive failures of our democracy.

There has been increasing newspaper discussion of juvenile crime since the war started. Some of it has been constructive, searching for causes and remedies; some has been merely sensational.

Has the war or conditions arising out of our national defense program greatly increased the problem? If so, why? In an attempt to find an answer, the National Probation Association

this year secured reports from 153 courts handling children's cases—including most of the large cities over the country and many smaller ones. We asked for the total number of youths up to sixteen or eighteen, according to the age jurisdiction of each state, coming before the courts for each of the years 1940, 1941, and 1942. Up to 1941 delinquency, so far as revealed by juvenile court records, had been generally decreasing. We were beginning to cope with the problem through improved probation work, child welfare services, and preventive work. The records of the 153 courts surveyed—and these may be considered fairly typical—showed that in 1941 delinquency cases increased  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent over 1940. In 1942 they increased  $8\frac{1}{2}$  per cent over 1941. This makes 16 per cent in the two years. Boys' cases last year increased 5 per cent but girls' cases increased 23 per cent.

These are not startling figures, except perhaps for the girls, but they reveal a disturbing trend, and recent reports from a number of courts reveal that it has continued in 1943. Without doubt this problem is accentuated by certain conditions indirectly chargeable to the war. The causes of delinquency are what they always have been: broken homes, heedless unfit parents, bad neighborhoods and companions, lack of wholesome recreation or constructive work, school maladjustment, lack of moral and religious training. These conditions are accompanied frequently by a defective health and mental or emotional development in the child. Seldom is there just one cause. Usually several are combined, with the unfit, inadequate home the commonest. Here is an actual case:

At fifteen a youth was brought into juvenile court, called by the police "a future gangster." He had high intelligence, good physique and personality. He had been able to talk himself out of every scrape till this one. He had been traveling about the country in cars he had stolen, making money by holding up gas stations at gunpoint.

The court officer began with an investigation of the lad's home. On the surface it appeared one of refinement and culture. An outsider would be surprised to learn that the parents constantly engaged in violent quarreling with each other. The psychiatrist who studied the case found that the boy was in an inner turmoil over the parents' con-

flicts. He had a finely attuned nervous system and could not take such a home life. He ran away and sought what to him was an easy and exciting way of making a living.

He was stunned by his detention but gradually was won over by kindly treatment in the court. He began to see why he acted as he did and agreed to find another way out. He was placed in a private boarding home at the expense of his parents. There he received friendly but firm supervision. He remained there two years. Away from family strife the boy had an opportunity to find himself. At seventeen he graduated from high school with highest honors and received a scholarship in college. At eighteen he is attending college and has registered for army service. He is now a worthy citizen, ready to do his part wherever needed.

This is perhaps an unusual case, though it indicates the attested fact that not poverty alone but rather maladjustment in the home and failure of the parents or natural guardians is often the basic cause of children going wrong. These are conditions which may be increased by war and its industrial dislocations.

**T**HE actual outbreak of war was preceded by a crescendo of preparations for war," says a report from the Los Angeles juvenile court. "The rapid expansion of war industry and other defense activities in 1941 was accompanied by increased employment of women, irregular working hours, economic inflation, and other factors tending to weaken the normal restraints of family life and increasing the temptations and opportunities for juvenile delinquency."

The court in a smaller city reported recently two girls and a boy, aged nine to twelve, children of a father and mother who were both working in a defense plant. The youngsters, brought in as experienced shoplifters, had gone through a number of stores and accumulated a real hoard of stuff.

Sometimes the parents work from economic necessity, but this is not always the case. In one instance a family was found living in two foul rooms behind a store. There were two young daughters out roaming the streets, stealing bicycles, and habitually reported truant from school. Both parents were working. The father was drawing \$80 to \$90 a week and was "playing the horses" with his money. The mother was working till two in the morning, and in addition to being out of touch with her daughters' evenings, wasn't getting up mornings to get them off to school.

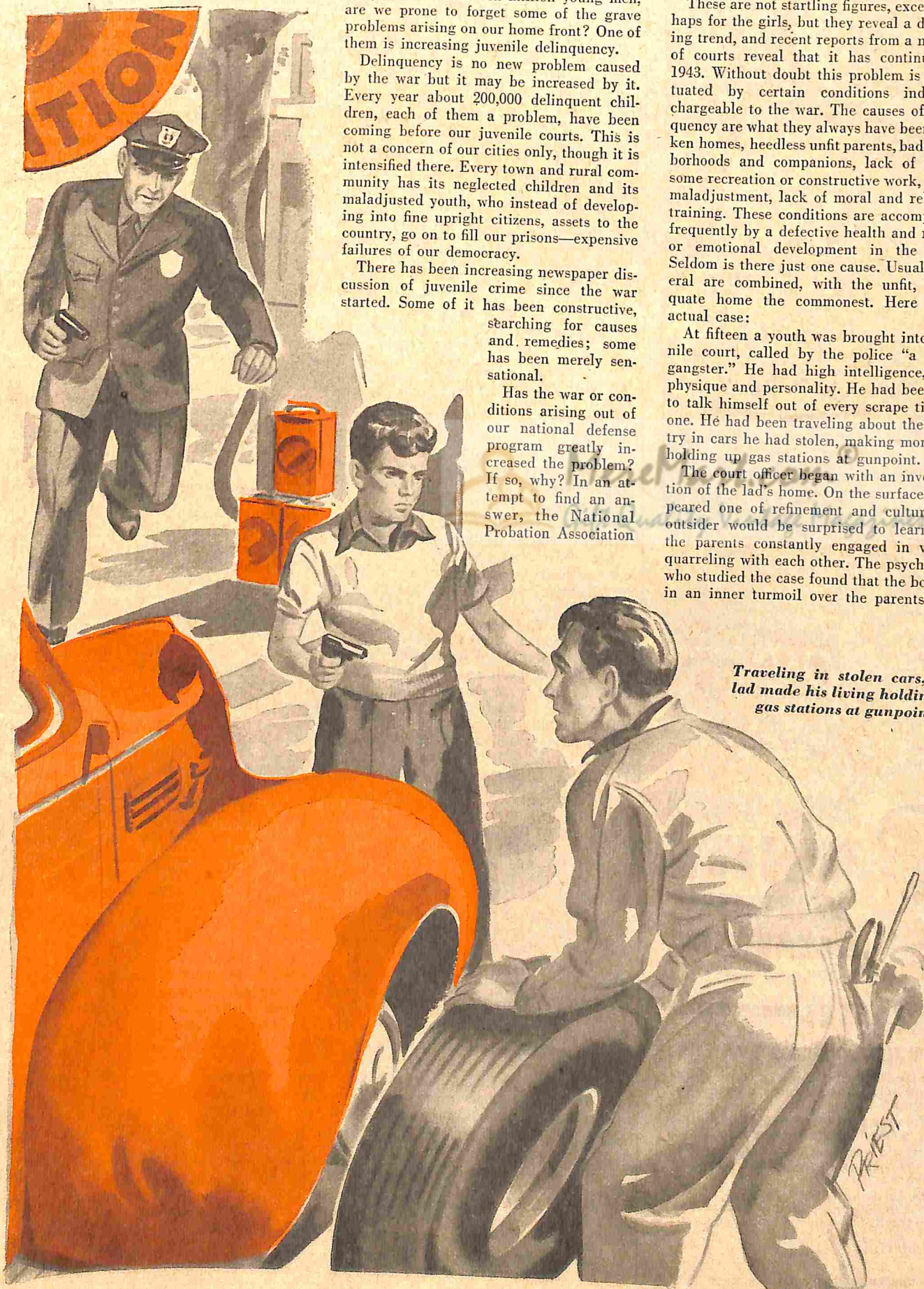
There is only one answer to this neglect which leads to delinquency. Parents must if possible be educated to their primary responsibility to their children and they must be helped when necessary. Sometimes the conditions are such that the child must be removed from surroundings in which he cannot but go wrong, and, as in the first case mentioned, placed in a boarding home or a good institution for a time.

A juvenile court judge says: "Where the father's income is adequate—and it is in most of the cases which come before me—there is no excuse for the mother to be out of the home. If there is no father or if the father's income is not large enough to care for his children properly, the state offers a subsidy under the aid-to-dependent-children program to allow the mother to stay with her family."

Of course some fathers have gone into the armed services and there will be more of

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Traveling in stolen cars, this lad made his living holding up gas stations at gunpoint.



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